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Why You May Soon Be Seeing Ads for Stents

J&J Campaign Combats Research That Slowed Sales

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Johnson & Johnson has taken the unusual step of launching a direct-to-consumer ad campaign for its Cypher drug-eluting stent as it looks to boost a once-high-flying business hurt in the past year by some research suggesting drug-eluting stents may actually increase patients' risk of heart attacks.



Full-page ads for Cypher in national newspapers combine giant headlines such as 'Gym Equipment' and 'Hiking Gear' with tiny photos of the stents.

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The consumer campaign, which appears to be the first for stents and a relative rarity for surgically implanted medical devices of any kind, is the first work for the brand from Omnicom Group's BBDO Worldwide, New York.

The assignment for J&J's Miami-based Cordis unit expands a foothold BBDO established when the giant consumer- and health-products marketer acquired Pfizer health and personal-care brands last year.

Big picture

Full-page ads for Cypher in national newspapers, including USA Today and The New York Times, combine giant headlines such as "Gym Equipment" and "Hiking Gear" with tiny photos of the stents, which are smaller than the width of a thumbnail.

"If you have angina, the Cypher Stent can help get your blood pumping and your body moving once again," the ads read, "so you can get back to living life -- working out, running, hiking, even sexual activity -- without chest pains."

"We launched this campaign to foster a conversation between patients and

their physicians," a Cordis spokeswoman said, "but also to increase awareness about coronary artery disease, its prevention and treatment options, and also the associated risks of those options."

The consumer ads step into a somewhat murky medical controversy that has reduced sales of Cypher Stents 40% in the first half compared with a year ago, though the brand's market share was actually up a point to 46% in the second quarter compared to a year ago.

Health risks

Research released last year indicated that patients treated with the Cypher Stent had a statistically significant increase in long-term incidence of death and heart attack compared to patients treated with bare-metal stents.

Drug-eluting stents such as Cypher are designed to improve long-term outcomes by releasing drugs that prevent the development of scar tissue that can cause coronary arteries to narrow again after a stent is implanted.

Some researchers have suggested that by preventing the formation of natural tissue around a stent, drug-eluting stents may actually increase the risk of sudden clotting, which can lead to heart attacks.

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